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ABSTRACT

An understanding of the forces affecting higher education can contribute to a perspective on the problems and issues facing colleges and universities. The forces are of two kinds: expansive and restrictive. Their basic drives are toward either growth or constraint. One of the major forces has been a generalized desire for more education for everyone. Colleges and universities may be near the point of exhausting the potential enrollment of college-age youth. Growth through increasing enrollment of adults in continuing education provides, at least temporarily, a new outlet for growth. The two areas of research and service are almost limitless but bring new dimensions to the conflict between expansion and restriction. It is concluded that purely educational factors and considerations play a minor role in determining which force wins. (Author/LBH)

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# EXPANSIVE AND RESTRICTIVE FORCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by
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## *A Framework for Examining Forces*

The history of higher education in the United States might well be summarized as the interplay between forces seeking to expand it and others seeking to restrict it. These forces continue to mold and shape higher education. A grasp of their nature and influence is essential to an understanding of past development and current issues in higher education.

Persons who are engaged in or are observers of higher education vaguely sense pushes and pulls from one direction or the other, usually without being aware of the underlying forces. College administrators and faculty members need not only to sense the daily tugs but also to comprehend the basic forces creating current issues in higher education and impinging on their work. Such comprehension will enable them to see their own jobs from a broader perspective and to formulate more coherent and more consistent views.

Forces are drives, influences, beliefs, and desires concerning higher education. They are sometimes elusive but always pervasive. They can be classified into two broad categories: expansive and restrictive.

Expansive forces are those that favor growth, increase, expansion. They would enlarge and extend all aspects of higher education. They tend toward more students, more staff, more facilities, more money. Simply put, their argument is that more education is good for both the individual and society.

Restrictive forces are those that favor limitation, constraint, restriction. They would decrease or restrain, not eliminate, higher education. Simply put, their argument is that higher education is for those having sufficient intelligence to grapple with advanced academic content. There is always the implication that great increases in quantity will dilute quality.

The inexorable trend in the United States has been the extension of higher education to increasingly larger proportions of the people. However, this trend has not been continuous but has occurred in waves as pressures have built to a head and have been relieved. But a major expansion, once established, has never been reversed.

Two simple broad classifications of people related to higher education readily come to mind. One consists of those directly connected with an institution on a daily basis, or the inside people; the other consists of those who have less frequent and intimate contacts with an institution, or the outside people. Major internal groups are faculty, administrators, students, and staff. Major external groups include the general public plus specific groups like government officials, foundation personnel, professionals, members of religious denominations, businessmen—the list could be extended at length. In general, external groups are not only more tangential to higher education, but also their memberships are more overlapping.

As in most constructs of social phenomena, all groups here do not fit into neat self-contained compartments. Alumni, for example, have a special feeling for the college they attended. Accrediting agencies typically represent colleges and universities, but are outside them, as are coordinating commissions and their staffs. It might be useful to postulate a third category, called mixed or internal-external, to contain such groups.

In spite of the limitations of cellular structure, a framework like that shown in Figure 1 is useful in organizing thought about forces affecting higher education. It is particularly useful if the horizontal and vertical axes are viewed as continuums rather than compartment-closing line segments. Such a framework may also provide a basis for theory building and for conducting systematic research on higher education.

## *The People Want More*

Of all expansive forces, probably the drives, ambitions, and expectations of the general public have been most potent. Because of the unobtrusive and usually unorganized nature of the general public's pressure, its power may be overlooked. With few exceptions, parents in America have wished for their sons and daughters a better education than they themselves were able to secure. The rationale was both economic and social: educated people were freer from physical drudgery and "learning" was respected.

It has been only in recent decades that the typical American could think seriously about going to college. In 1900, there was only 3.9 percent of the college-age population in college; in 1920, it was 7.9 percent; in 1940, it was 14.5 percent; and in 1970, it rose to

Figure 1. Forces Affecting Higher Education

| PEOPLE | DIRECTION | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Restrictive | Expansive-Restrictive | Expansive |
| Internal Groups | Faculty | Students | Administrators |
| Internal-External Groups (Mixed) | Accrediting Agencies | Alumni | Trustees |
| External Groups | Professionals | Legislators | General Public |

47.6 percent.[1] These increases resulted not only from parents' capacity and willingness to provide financial help for their children to go to college but also from the general backing the people gave elected officials who favored larger governmental appropriations for institutions of higher learning.

Even before the period of widespread college-going on the part of the young, the public's interest in education contributed indirectly to the expansion of higher education. The normal school is a good illustration. By the mid-decades of the Nineteenth Century there was a great movement for universal and free elementary schooling. As enrollments in elementary schools grew, so did the demand for teachers to staff them. The existing colleges were too limited to produce sufficient numbers. Their curricula were primarily classical and oriented toward a few selected professions. They were both unwilling and unable to adjust to meet the increased need for teachers. But the people would not be denied trained teachers for their children. Out of the impasse a new type of institution, the normal school, was invented.

Horace Mann, in an address at the dedication of the state normal schoolhouse at Bridgewater, Massachusetts, in 1846, referred to the battle against the new type institution:

> The Normal Schools were supposed by name to stand in an antagonistic relation to academies and select schools; and some teachers of academies and select schools have opposed them. They declared that they can make as good teachers as Normal Schools can. But, sir, academies and select schools have existed in this state, in great numbers, for more than half a century . . . Now, if the academies and high schools can supply an adequate number of school teachers, why have they not done it? We have waited half a century for them. Let them not complain to us, because we are unwilling to wait half a century more. Academies are good in their place, colleges are good in their place . . . but they have not provided a sufficiency of competent teachers.[2]

A few other similar situations have arisen. The Land-Grant Colleges were created to meet the nation's need for trained farmers, mechanics, and soldiers because the then existing colleges were not providing an adequate supply of such people.

Allan Nevins cites four major elements in the events leading to the founding of these colleges:

> Anything seemed possible to the nineteenth century civilization that was conquering one land after another by the industrial revolution and a new social enlightenment. Against this background the college education of earlier times seemed hopelessly antiquated; it had to be wrested out of the ruts which it had so long traveled. A revolt against it grew, compounded primarily of four elements: rejection of the tyranny of classical and theological studies, championship of science, insistence on attention to agriculture and the mechanic arts, and—most important of all—a demand for greater democracy in education.[3]

The community junior college is the most recent type of institution to arise as the result of a major expansion in higher education. Junior colleges, both private and public, were in existence long before the public community junior college movement mushroomed after World War II. Some states, like Mississippi and Georgia, even had state systems of junior colleges dating back to the 1920's. With a few exceptions, the junior colleges in operation prior to World War II, however, were really "junior" colleges offering only the first two years of the typical four-year college curriculum. They were neither comprehensive nor community-oriented.

Roueche succinctly states the argument that the community college is the culmination of the historic movement toward universal post-secondary education.

> Many regard the establishment of community colleges as the most obvious effort to democratize higher education. Community colleges allow each individual the opportunity to progress as far as his interest and abilities permit.[4]

### *The Federal Role in Expansion*

Through most of its history, the Federal government has been relatively unconcerned with influencing higher education. World War II marked a major turning point. Prior to it there had been some grants of public lands for higher education, the military academies had been established and operated, and the land-grant colleges had been supported. The New Deal years saw some college facilities built and a few students assisted through National Youth Administration. The New Deal began to make extensive use for the first time of "brain trusters" from colleges and universities in major federal policy-making and administrative positions. In every case the motivating force was not direct concern for the support of higher education but for meeting some other national problem or helping to attain some other national goal.

The Korean War and the Cold War kept defense and military service at high levels. Science and technology received added emphasis when the Russians put the first satellite into space. Federal funds for scientific research and for the training of scientists and engineers were made available to colleges and universities. Federal court decisions concerning desegregation began to have an impact on higher education soon after World War II.

In spite of all these developments, it was not until the Higher Education Act of 1965 that the federal government passed legislation based directly on a concern for promoting higher education itself. Even some aspects of this law resulted partly from other interests. For example, the student assistance provided through loans, work-study, and educational opportunity grants were for the economically disadvantaged and really constituted a part of the war on poverty.

Whatever the underlying reasons, in the last thirty years the federal government has become a major expansive force for higher education. Because of its great funding potential, the national government is a point at which the expansionists of higher education direct continuing, major, and sometimes concerted efforts.

### *The Slowing of Growth*

The full impact of the rapid expansion of the soaring sixties could hardly be realized before the bubble burst. For the first time in a quarter century, colleges and universities confronted stable or decreasing numbers of students, curtailed finances, diminished public confidence, and a crisis made worse by lack of experience in confronting stability or equilibrium.

With respect to the inevitable braking of growth in the early 1970's, Reisman wryly comments:

> One easily gets the impression that all higher education has suffered because of the backlash against campus turmoil, and against the symbolic crusades mounted from the campus in favor of new values and lifestyles. Yet quite apart from campus unrest, higher education was bound to lose the momentum of its great leap forward in the 1950s and early 1960s, else it would have consumed the national product for salaries and the national forests for journal articles.[5]

While the American people as a whole have been typically expansionist with regard to higher education, their interest has welled and receded. Often it has been expressed as support of a particular type of institution in which a segment of the public has a special interest. Commenting on the plethora of commission studies and reports concerning higher education, Fincher notes:

> If the commissions' recommendations for higher education are inconsistent, conflicting, and often contradictory, it may well be because inherent ambiguities characterize the institutions about which the commissions are speaking that the American people have never resolved. In brief, the fundamental attitude of the American public toward higher education has always been strangely ambivalent.[6]

Confronted by expansive demands from all these sources and in most states competing demands among the colleges and universities themselves, state governments have sought ways to secure unified appropriations requests from the higher education community and to avoid undesirable competition and duplication among the colleges and universities. The typical vehicle for accomplishing these ends has been the coordinating commission for higher education. This agency serves as a kind of buffer between the state, especially the legislature, and its colleges. It is a kind of internal-external agency, representing institutions of higher education, but not of them, and more restraining than expansive. Because of the very reasons for which they were established, coordinating commissions and institutional administrators have had uneasy, sometimes unhappy relationships. Almost every college administrator has viewed with alarm the establishment of such commissions and the extension of their authority. On the other hand, state officials often feel that the commissions do not exercise sufficient restraint on ambitious colleges.

### *Internal Expansionists and Restrictionists*

The most expansive of the internal groups are the administrators. Presidents are wont to brag about larger enrollments and more money. Conversely, they feel that decreased enrollments and smaller budgets are reflections of some personal failure. The natural tendency of bureaucracies to grow contributes to layers of administrators including associates, assistants, assistants to, and special assistants. The demands for

volumes of paper work in the form of federal reports, state reports, association reports, annual reports, quarterly reports, and monthly reports contribute to the growth of administration. Complexities of organizational structure, like the overlaying of boards of trustees with commissions, and development of multibased programs drawing from several disciplines, require coordination and liaison personnel. In some complex institutional structures, there are administrators whose dealings are only with other administrators and of whose existence neither students nor faculty members are aware.

Generally, the farther removed administrators are from faculty, the more expansive they tend to be. Thus, presidents tend to be more expansive than deans and deans tend to be more expansive than department heads. Occasionally a department head and even a whole department may be on a growth binge. This phenomenon is likely to be found in newer and not fully accepted departments or academic fields.

Faculty are typically restrictive in their viewpoint. They may be labeled elitist or reactionary, but they see themselves as protecting standards and upholding quality. Many professors are quick to contend that there is an incompatibility between quantity and quality, that only a limited number of students have the intellectual capacity to cope with their discipline. Large numbers of new students or broadened offerings will inevitably result in weakening a strong program. They find the way to academic excellence in smaller classes, fewer teaching hours, brighter students, and more time for research and scholarship. Their protectionism extends to new and untried or inferior intrusions of subject matter.

It is generally thought that faculty are expansive with regard to their salaries. This is undoubtedly true if other restrictive policies can be maintained. One notable case is reported in which faculty repudiated even this expansive opportunity in order to maintain restrictive values they considered important. It is alleged that when James B. Conant was president of Harvard, he offered to double the salaries of Harvard College faculty if they in turn would agree to double the size of their classes. This offer the faculty refused.

### *Restraint Through Accreditation*

Regional accrediting associations are internal-external groups. Their membership consists of educational institutions so that any member institution is subject to the collective wisdom of its neighbors. The origin of the regional associations lay in the effort of strong institutions to recognize their quality, expressed in minimum standards, in contrast to the lack of quality in weak colleges. They were, thus, instituted as restrictive agencies to reduce competition and belie the claims of unqualified rivals. As accrediting agencies grew in numbers and prestige, few unaccredited institutions were able to survive. Over the years standards continued to be raised but never faster than the overwhelming majority of member institutions could meet them.

Regional associations not only insulated their members from shoddy competition, but also protected their integrity from external instrusions such as the efforts of politicians to control their affairs. Standard Two of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools is specific on this point:

> The governing board should not be subject to undue pressure from state officials or other outside political or religious groups; furthermore, the governing board should protect the administration from similar outside pressures.[7]

By their nature, professions provide a specialized service needed by the general public requiring a period of extensive training and apprenticeship. Spurred not only by the desire for public confidence in the quality of their services, but also by more mundane considerations such as the danger that excessive numbers of practitioners would reduce the monetary value of services, some professions have limited access to preparation programs. Accreditation has been a highly effective instrument. McGlothlin reports:

> Led by the American Medical Association which began accrediting in 1905, the professions themselves established procedures for accrediting the professional schools to supplement institution-wide accrediting done by the regional associations. Today, almost all professional schools are subject to accrediting by some agency of the professions. In some professions, like engineering, the accrediting agency goes so far as to accredit even the specialized curricula within the professional school, being unwilling to make a blanket approval of the whole school unless all its parts are satisfactory.[8]

### *Battlegrounds of the Future*

While rapid expansion of continuing education will have its resisters, they will center restrictiveness on specific issues such as external degrees which do not require any on-campus residence. They will also resist the insistent demands of adults for education on their own terms, that is, the content they want at times and places convenient to them.

More controversial are two other areas of potential expansion, one of which has already been a major source of both growth and conflict. The two areas are research and public service. In kind, they are somewhat different from other bases for expansion in that a fundamental question can be raised about whether they are essential or appropriate to an educational institution.

The need for scientific expertise for military purposes in World War II led to Federal employment of many university scientists and to contracts with universities to develop desired war capabilities. Except for previous agricultural and engineering research conducted through land grant colleges, this was a new direction for university research destined to become a major thrust. As the United States became involved in increasingly unpopular wars, the appro-

priateness of large-scale university participation in the development of ever more sophisticated and lethal weapons systems came to be questioned. In the late 1960s, opposition to such university action became widespread and in some instances violent.

At Massachusetts Institute of Technology where, by 1969, two laboratories (Lincoln Laboratory and the Instrumentation Laboratory) supported entirely by Federal money constituted 51 percent of its budget, dissension became so general that a decision was made to divest the Instrumentation Laboratory from the Institute.[9]

The controversy over university product-oriented research was broadened in 1973 by a report of the Agribusiness Accountability Project. This publication, *Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times*, was a scathing attack on the domination of land grant college agricultural activities, especially research, by large agricultural business corporations.

> It is curious that the land grant community can pour billions of tax dollars into public assistance for giant agribusiness corporations without once questioning their need or making moral judgments about their worthiness, but when the system hands out a research token to rural people it must come with a condescending smugness about their condition. Again and again, the point is made that industry needs help because it cannot do its own research and because it is affected by external factors. People, however, are responsible for their own condition. For one, public research assistance is an investment; for the other, that assistance is welfare.[10]

Writing about the profound changes research has wrought in universities, Johnson points out that:

> Fundamental changes in our society in the past century have caused a new, historically unique intellectual institution to come into existence—the publicly maintained center for general and applied research and development. So gradually and unobstrusively has it come from the womb that we have been able to recognize its existence only negatively in its effects, and particularly in the nearly fatal ambiguity which has been introduced into its academic birthplace.

He further pinpoints the issue which needs to be resolved:

> The point is, simply, that the functions and the criteria of these New Institutions are no longer educative ones. That is, they are not chiefly concerned with providing a critically maintained intellectual tradition and the basic skills necessary for employing it and effectively placing it at the disposal of our civilization. The immediate practical problem, then, comes down to this: We must choose whether we wish to turn the present "university" entirely into the New Institution, without cramping it by an educative mold, and then build anew along properly educational lines—or whether we wish to restore strictly educational functions to our present centers of higher learning and build the New Institution separately.[12]

The second non-educational arena for potential growth is that of public service. Most universities have theoretically adopted a three-part mission—instruction, research, and service. So minor has been the service activity that its nature and scope are undefined. In their effort to prove that they are performing a service role some institutions have confused extension instruction with service. Applied research such as school or community studies may also be confused with service.

Yet the push for enlarging service programs continues on the part of those within institutions who desire growth and by those from outside who need service. A major study sponsored by the Southern Regional Education Board (1974) dealt with university assistance to state government. After citing what is being done, what needs there are, and some of the problems involved, the study concludes:

> In short, if these principles are followed in assessing the specific problems and limitations present in particular states, and reasonable actions are taken to alleviate the practical difficulties now inhibiting closer working relationships, there is no inherent reason why the academic community cannot become a more significant backup force to state government.[13]

### *Conclusion*

An understanding of the forces affecting higher education can contribute to a perspective on the problems and issues facing colleges and universities. Basically the forces are of two kinds: expansive and restrictive. Even though they have become complex and subtle, their basic drive is toward either growth or constraint.

One of the major forces has been a generalized desire for more education for everybody. Colleges and universities may be near the point of exhausting the potential enrollment of college-age youth. Growth through increasing enrollment of adults in continuing education provides, at least temporarily, a new outlet for growth. The two areas of research and service are almost limitless, but both are fraught with an interplay of forces and controversy bringing new dimensions to the conflict between expansion and restriction.

One salient fact stands out in an examination of the forces affecting higher education. Purely educational factors and considerations play a minor role in determining which force wins battles.

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